

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PHNOM 01623 271111Z

46

ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9096

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMUSSAG NKP THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 1623

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, SOPN, CB

SUBJECT: KOMPONG SEILA--GALLANT FOOTNOTE TO THE WAR IN CAMBODIA

1. THE PUBLICATION BY THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BULLETIN ON JANUARY 25 OF NEWS OF THE VISIT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL NORODOM CHANTARANGSEY TO KOMPONG SEILA ON JANUARY 15, BRINGS TO PUBLIC VIEW ONE OF THE HITHERTO LITTLE NOTICED SAGAS OF THE WAR IN CAMBODIA.

2. THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF KOMPONG SEILA IS LOCATED ON HIGHWAY 4, THE ROUTE FROM THE CAPITAL TO THE PORT OF KOMPONG SOM, ABOUT 126 KILOMETERS SOUTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH. IN THE PERIOD OF HEAVY FIGHTING IN THE SPRING OF 1974, THE ENEMY SUCCEEDED IN ROLLING UP GOVERNMENT POSITIONS ALONG MUCH OF THE LENGTH OF THIS ROUTE, BUT A STRONG GARRISON REMAINED BEHIND AT KOMPONG SEILA, TOGETHER WITH THE CIVILIAN POPULATUION, LEAVING AN ENCLAVE UNDER SIEGE EVER SINCE. THE SIEGE DATES FROM MAY 1974 AND, AS THE GKR PUBLICATION PROUDLY PROCLAIMS, IT HAS NOW ESTABLISHED A RECORD FOR THE INDOCHINA WAR, ECLIPSING THE 56 DAYS OF DIEN BIEN PHU AND THE 96 DAYS OF AN LOC. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, THE RESUPPLY OF KOMPONG SEILA IN MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED BY COSTLY AIRDROP OF FOOD AND

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PAGE 02 PHNOM 01623 271111Z

AMMUNITION HAS BEEN A MAJOR CONCERN TO OUR MILITARY

ASSISTANCE EFFORT IN CAMBODIA.

3. DURING THE MANY MONTHS IN WHICH THIS VALIANT GARRISON HAS BEEN CUT OFF, IT HAS SUSTAINED AT TIMES EXTREMELY HEAVY ENEMY ATTACKS, BOTH ON THE GROUND AND BY INDIRECT FIRE, AMOUNTING AT TIMES IN A SINGLE NIGHT TO A ROUGH THOUSAND ROUNDS OF INCOMING ARTILLERY, ROCKET AND MORTAR FIRE. OBVIOUSLY, FRIENDLY CASUALTIES HAD BEEN VERY HIGH. HOW HIGH? WHAT WAS THE TRUE CONDITION OF THE GARRISON AND THE CIVILIAN POPULATION, HOW MANY WERE ILL OF DISEASE AS WELL AS HOW MANY WOUNDED BY ENEMY ACTION, WHAT WAS THE LEVEL OF MALNUTRITION IN THE CHILDREN--THESE AND MANY MORE QUESTIONS COULD NOT BE ANSWERED BY FLEETING AND CRYPTIC RADIO BROADCASTS, ALWAYS SUBJECT TO POSSIBLE ENEMY INTERCEPTION. THE ENEMY WAS DETERMINED TO ERASE THIS ENCLAVE, AND HIS EFFORTS TO DO SO TIED DOWN MANY OF HIS FORCES.

4. DURING DECEMBER, IN A PERIOD IN WHICH THE ENEMY WAS OBVIOUSLY PREPARING FOR THE CURRENT DRY SEASON CAMPAIGN, HE DREW OFF HIS LOCAL FORCES FROM THE KOMPONG SEILA AREA, LEAVING IT ALMOST DESERTED. GRADUALLY, IN GINGERLY FASHION, THE KOMPONG SEILA GARRISON BEGAN TO PUSH OUT PROBING PATROLS, TWO, THREE, FIVE, TEN KILOMETERS IN ALL DIRECTIONS, WITH ONLY OCCASIONAL ENEMY CONTACT. AT THIS POINT FANK CONCEIVED THE PROJECT OF ATTEMPTING TO LAND BY HELICOPTER A SMALL FORCE IN ORDER TO LEARN THE TRUE NUMBERS AND CONDITION OF THE GARRISON.

5. THE CONTACTING FORCE REPORTED THAT THERE WERE STILL SOME 8,800 CIVILIANS IN BELEAGUERED KOMPONG SEILA, PLUS 800 MILITARY EFFECTIVES; THERE HAD BEEN 390 MILITARY KILLED IN ACTION, ANOTHER 200 WOUNDED AND ANOTHER 200 WERE HOSPITALIZED FOR OTHER ILLNESSES, MALARIA AND THE LIKE. NO FIGURES WERE RECEIVED ON CIVILIAN KILLED AND WOUNDED, THOUGH THEY MUST HAVE BEEN VERY MANY.

6. THE FIRST HELICOPTERS TO LAND TOOK OUT A NUMBER  
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PHNOM 01623 271111Z

OF THE MORE SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT, AND IT WAS THIS WHICH HAS JUST BEEN PUBLICIZED, WAS THE VISIT OF THE MILITARY REGION COMMANDER, GENERAL CHANTARANGSEY, WHO SUPERVISED A CEREMONY IN WHICH THE MILITARY COMMANDER AT SEILA, COL. ROS SONN, WAS PINNED WITH THE STARS OF A BRIGADIER GENERAL, IN RECOGNITION OF THE NINE MONTHS' VALIANT EFFORT OF HIS FORCES.

7. THE WAR SWEEPS ON, AND THE CURTAIN BRIEFLY LIFTED ON THE GARRISON OF BESEIGED KOMPONG SEILA HAS SLOWLY BEEN LOWERED FOR NOW. ALTHOUGH A RESCUE OPERATION FOR THE ENTIRE GARRISON, MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, NEARLY 10,000 STRONG, MIGHT BE THEROETICALLY POSSIBLE, FANK SIMPLY CANNOT DIVERT THE NECESSARY ASSETS FROM THE MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS OF PHNOM PENH AND THE LOWER MEKONG. WE MAY NOT HEAR OF KOMPONG SEILA AGAIN FOR A WHILE, PERHAPS NOT BEFORE AN EVENTUAL POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO THE CAMBODIAN WAR. BUT SOMEDAY THE STORY OF THE HEROISM AND SUFFERING OF THE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF KOMPONG SEILA WILL BECOME A PART OF THE HISTORY OF THIS TRAGIC PERIOD IN THE LAND OF THE KHMERS.

8. NOTE: THE ONLY CLASSIFIED INFORMATION IN THE ABOVE IS THE FIGURES ON PEOPLE NOW IN KOMPONG SEILA AND THE CASUALTIES. ADDRESSEES MAY DRAW ON THE BALANCE FOR WHATEVER USE THEY DEEM APPROPRIATE.  
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